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Improving the Availability of ISSN—A Joint Project

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Abstract

This session described the 2015 pilot project and ongoing cooperation between the International ISSN Centre based in Paris and ProQuest to identify active titles without ISSN. The project is using Ulrich's periodicals database as the initial resource. Under the supervision of the International Centre, national ISSN centers determine whether the ISSN is simply missing or has never been assigned. The outcome of the project will be a benefit to librarians, publishers, and vendors as more titles will have ISSN registered with the national and international ISSN centers and in Ulrich's Periodical Database. This will improve the electronic loading and matching of titles. Gaëlle Béquet, director of the International ISSN Centre, and Laurie Kaplan of ProQuest discussed how the project came to be, the pilot work and refinements to the process, and the ongoing work and schedule for going forward. The audience was encouraged to ask questions and help determine the best way to encourage all interested parties to use the ISSN as an identifier whenever possible.

Librarians, publishers, content vendors, subscription agents, discovery systems, and others need to exchange data on a daily basis. And anything that can make this process more successful by improving the ability to match updates to existing records is of great interest to these parties. Gaëlle Béquet of the International ISSN Centre/CIEPS and Laurie Kaplan of ProQuest developed a joint project between the two organizations to address this very issue.

This project arose out of research that G. Béquet was conducting using Ulrichsweb™, an international database of periodicals produced by ProQuest. She noticed several active titles that did not have ISSN, and contacted L. Kaplan to discuss the possible reasons. After several meetings between the parties, dating back to November 2014 at the Charleston Conference, an agreement was signed to conduct a pilot project, which started in February 2015. The purpose of the project is to improve the assignment rate of ISSN for serial publications worldwide. The impetus for both organizations centered around their reliance on and acknowledgement of the importance of complete and trustworthy bibliographic metadata. The ability to share data to create more complete records was of interest to both parties.

The project has just moved out of the pilot phase, and will involve active serial titles and book series without ISSN in order to have those ISSN assigned

by the appropriate ISSN center. Under the supervision of the International Centre, national ISSN centers will determine whether the ISSN is simply missing or has never been assigned.

The starting point is the data behind Ulrich's Periodicals Directory™, an international resource that has been published by ProQuest and its predecessors since 1932. The data in Ulrich's is mostly received directly from the publishers with an emphasis on scholarly publications, which is data the ISSN network is also interested in but may miss during the ISSN registration. The ISSN Centre and ProQuest have had a good working relationship for many years. The US ISSN Center, in fact, has had a ProQuest employee working at the Library of Congress since 2000, improving the ISSN coverage and cataloging of ProQuest resources and contributing to the ISSN assignments for the US Center. Additionally, the ALA ALCTS Outstanding Collaboration Citation was awarded in February 2015 to ProQuest and the US ISSN Center; this project would reinforce the partnership.

In order to determine how to structure the pilot project the ProQuest team conducted research and ran reports from Ulrich's database for active titles, print or online, without ISSN by content type (e.g., academic/scholarly), by serial type (e.g., journal or newsletter), and by country. The pilot project focused on active print and online

titles without ISSN from the Netherlands, initially only academic/scholarly titles, then extended to trade publications and other content types. Working with one local ISSN Center—the Netherlands ISSN Center—facilitated communications by having a consistent team from which to receive feedback. The Netherlands ISSN Center had the ability and the interest to engage in the pilot project, and the ProQuest product managers agreed that improving these records would be a good place to start.

The International ISSN Center and ProQuest agreed to share 16 metadata elements including title and subtitle, language, country, date of publication, related serials, title history, and publisher information. The fields in Ulrich's were mapped to MARC fields to help the ISSN Centers research the titles. The first set of data included 220 titles, many of which were monographic series. The International ISSN Centre team first compared the titles to the ISSN Register. Thirty-eight were found in the register, and this information was returned to the ProQuest team. The remaining 182 titles were sent to ISSN Netherlands for further investigation. During the ensuing months the International ISSN Centre and ProQuest teams met to discuss the progress and clarify any data and terminology issues raised by ISSN Netherlands. An additional 80 records, mostly trade journals, were sent to the Netherlands.

The impact of the pilot project to date is as follows:

- Added over 100 ISSN to Ulrich's and the ISSN Register
- Raised good conversations about monographic series
- Started the conversation regarding how to get publishers to use these new ISSN, and their ISSN in general when posting titles online and when transferring titles among various parties

Based on the success of the pilot the International ISSN Centre and ProQuest agreed to extend the pilot and send over 700 additional titles to the Netherlands, and also to formalize the agreement

and extend the work to additional countries, in Europe first and then other parts of the world. At the annual ISSN Directors' meeting that took place October 13–16, 2015 a presentation was made about the partnership with ProQuest to 50 ISSN directors. The directors were informed about the plan to expand geographic coverage of the project. The level of overlapping records with the ISSN Register was low during the pilot. It seemed clear that if the ISSN was missing in the Ulrich's title record it most likely had not been assigned by an ISSN Center, especially since the Ulrich's editors always check the ISSN Portal for ISSN questions. The project should improve the assignment of ISSN to the identified periodicals.

One lesson learned from the pilot project was that it takes a considerable amount of time to research a title using the ISSN Register, the publisher's website, and the open web. It should be noted that legal deposit in the Netherlands was established in 1974. Thus serials published prior to this date may not be part of the national collections. To perform ISSN assignment the team at ISSN Netherlands relies on external large title databases such as GGC_OCLC, the online shared cataloging system within the Netherlands, WorldCat (OCLC), Zeitschriftendatenbank (Germany), SUDOC (France), and the catalogues of the Library of Congress and the British Library. Moreover, the National Library of the Netherlands no longer collects print journals by Elsevier, Kluwer Academic, Brill Academic Publishers, and IOS Press. The Library cannot process and store both print and digital formats of the same journal, and it strives to collect only the digital format. For e-journals, the KB collection is based on separate digital articles. From 2016 onward this policy will be applied to more Dutch publishers. Regarding monographic series, ISSN Netherlands assign ISSN when publishers request it, except for specific publishers like Brill whose book series are automatically assigned ISSN.

In most cases so far we can rely on identical content for both print and digital versions, and this shouldn't be a problem for ISSN assignment since it can be confirmed by the publisher. But sometimes it was already doubtful if the print version was ever published for an existing e-

journal (in several cases of Elsevier it appeared no print version was ever published although an ISSN had been requested).

Scarcity of resources at the various ISSN centers may create difficulties regarding projected timeframes. And daily work at the ISSN center suffers when the team is involved in the project work. Starting in January 2016 ProQuest will consider hiring an intern if the local ISSN center requests assistance, to see if this will help reduce the backlog of daily work, enabling the more experienced staff to work on the project.

The outcome of the project will be a benefit to librarians, publishers, and vendors as more titles will have ISSN registered with the national and international ISSN centers and in Ulrich's Periodical Database and Ulrichsweb™. This will improve the electronic loading and matching of titles for any product or system. The value of the project will extend beyond the ISSN network and ProQuest, since publishers, libraries, catalog databases, documentation centers, subscription agencies, academic institutions, retailers, and wholesalers all rely on ISSN as an identification point for serial publications, a way to facilitate distinguishing between serials with identical names, or a record control number. Libraries and others worldwide will benefit from this cooperation as it will result in more complete data

being available for active periodicals published around the world.

Both parties acknowledge that assigning ISSN is only the first step in furthering the value of ISSN in the publishing world. Newly assigned ISSN must be incorporated into publisher files and included on publisher websites for the ISSN to become part of the process of transferring and updating titles for librarians. ProQuest and ISSN IC will work together to encourage the use of the newly assigned ISSN by the appropriate publishers and providers of serials content. The NISO PIE-J Recommended Practice also encourages the use of ISSN, and the upcoming revision of ISO-8 will further reinforce the importance of the ISSN for print and online serial publications. Ensuring that more periodicals include ISSN, and that those ISSN are registered with the local center and the International ISSN Centre, can only improve the exchange of data and the citation of data for all parties.

One attendee at the 2015 Charleston Conference presentation suggested two white papers that could be written by the presenters about ISSN for monographic series and the need for publishers and those involved in data exchange to use ISSN. Another attendee remarked that when records have proper ISSN, linking is improved for online journals.